

GMO Labeling: To Be Or Not To Be?



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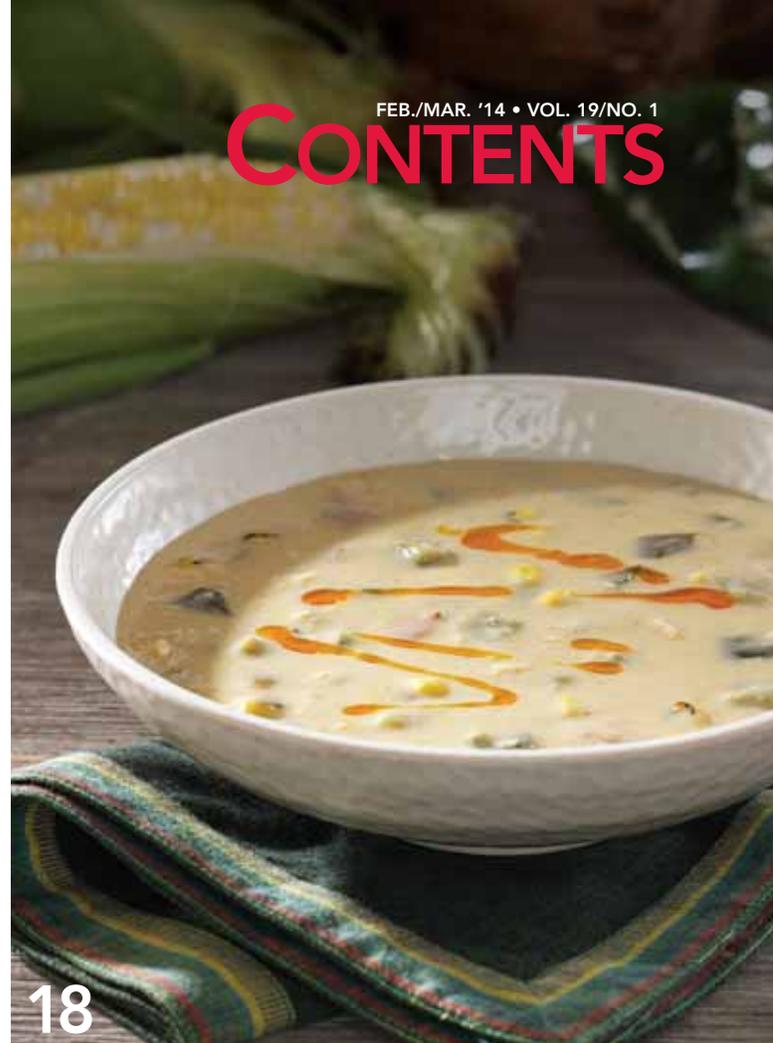
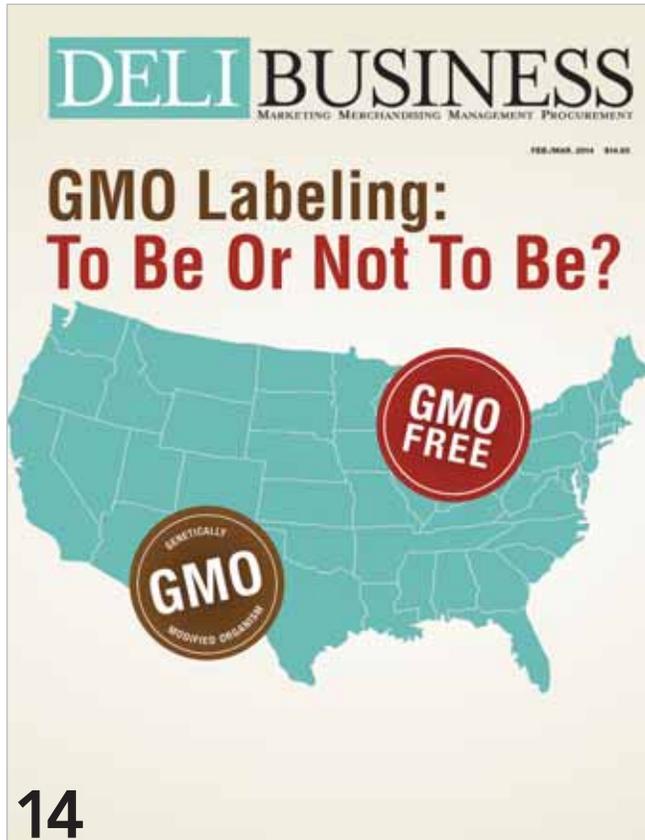


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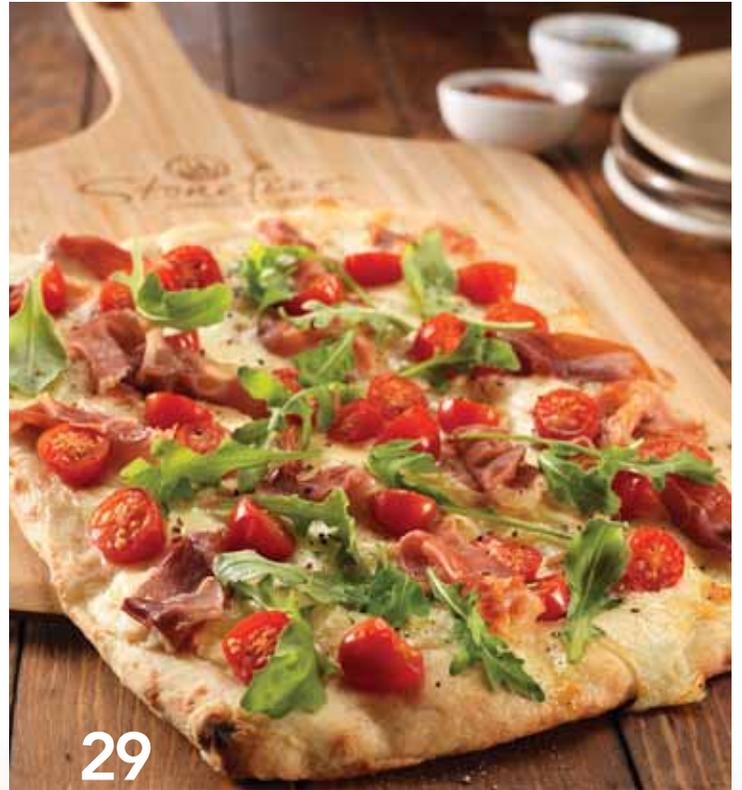
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A RARE FIND INDEED



A recent discovery has left cheese lovers worldwide in a state of shock and awe. Ancient cheese, which can be traced back almost 3,600 years, was found on the necks and chests of Chinese mummies buried in the desert, north of Tibet.

The combination of desert air and salty soil is being credited with the astonishingly intact and preserved state of the cheese crumbs.

The location of the excavation, which was conducted in the 1930s by a Swedish expedition, was rediscovered early in this century by a group of Chinese archaeologists who relied on GPS navigation.

It can't be verified why these mummies were buried with cheese morsels but ancient civilizations often provided sustenance for loved ones in the afterlife. Scientific analysis, which was just completed, shows that this cheese variety was made from a combination of bacteria and yeast, similar to today's cottage cheese.

COMING NEXT ISSUE IN APRIL/MAY 2014

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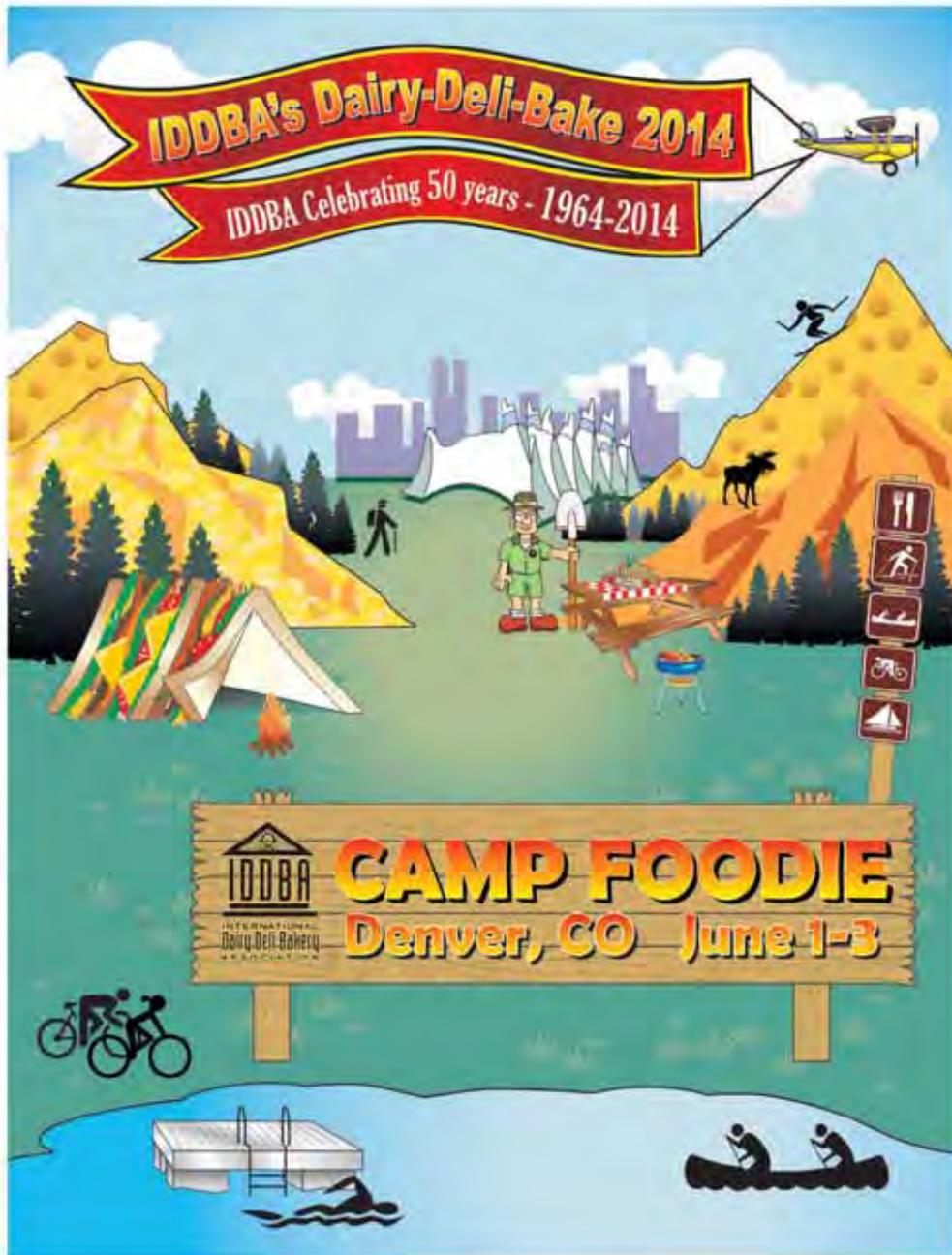
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Announcements



NEW COMTÉ USA WEBSITE

The Comté Cheese Association has relaunched its U.S. website, featuring a fresh, easy-to-navigate design and expanded content. The website — www.comte-usa.com — is now oriented to both American consumers and members of the trade with recipes, videos, news and information about the Comté region and its production. Members of the trade have easier-than-ever access to the Comté Cheese Association's POS and training materials, as well as the importer & distributor list and purchasing/receiving tips. Made exclusively in the Jura Mountain region of France, Comté is an artisanal PDO, or protected designation of origin, cheese.

www.comte-usa.com



MCCORMICK CELEBRATES ITS 125TH ANNIVERSARY

McCormick & Company is kicking off a yearlong 125th anniversary celebration by launching its "Flavor of Together" campaign. McCormick's overall goal of this initiative is to unite people around the world as they share 1.25 million stories about the special roles food and flavor play in our lives. McCormick For Chefs, McCormick's Food Away From Home division, is helping to celebrate 125 years of leading flavor innovation by asking culinary professionals from all corners of the globe to share their flavor stories. For every story shared, McCormick will donate \$1, up to \$1.25 million, to United Way.

www.mccormickforchefs.com



JARLSBERG WEBSITE RELAUNCHED

Norseland, Incorporated, U.S. subsidiary of TINE SA, Norway's largest dairy cooperative is relaunching its Jarlsberg USA website, to reflect TINE's global messaging for 2014. The website's theme, Yours to Share, centers on the Jarlsberg experience, encouraging interaction with consumers by connecting the joy of eating Jarlsberg to lifestyle occasions. The website and all social media platforms will work in tandem, creating a premium digital relationship with fans. "For over five decades, Jarlsberg has played a key role in developing the specialty cheese category, becoming a favorite brand in the U.S.," says Valerie Liu, marketing and advertising specialist.

www.jarlsbergusa.com



NEW BRAND PACKAGING

Toufayan Bakeries, one of the largest family-run bakeries in the U.S., will roll out new packaging beginning this spring. As part of a branding and marketing initiative launched mid-2013, Toufayan introduced a new website, comprehensive marketing and public relations campaigns and upgraded the company's logo and packaging. "We're excited to roll out the new packaging nationwide," says Karen Toufayan, vice president sales and marketing. "The updated design allows consumers to easily see the fresh tasting products and discover key nutritional information and certifications, including those from the American Heart Association."

www.toufayan.com

New Products



TURKEY BREAST FILETS

As the go-to turkey resource for food-service operators, Butterball Foodservice is proactively addressing patrons' demands for healthful menu options by launching 4 oz. turkey breast filets. Created with chefs' and operators' needs in mind, the filets are very versatile and offer new great-tasting, better-for-you menu options. The filets are low in fat, calories and sodium, and contain no trans fat or MSG. The filets are individually packed in easy-peel film. The film is perforated allowing for one-at-a-time use. Also, the filets can be cooked from frozen with no thawing necessary for freezer-to-grill convenience.

www.butterballfoodservice.com



EASY-TO-INSTALL BOX SYSTEM FOR OIL

Operators who currently buy boxed fresh oil and require staff to pour the oil into their fryers now have an easy, hands-free option with Frontline International's Box System for Standard Packaged Oil. With the Box System, winner of a 2012 Kitchen Innovations Award, operators purchase their choice of fresh oil in boxes and — in a smaller footprint than is typically used to store the boxed oil — simply stack the boxes on the storage rack. The easy-to-install system can be positioned in a storage area far removed from the actual fryer location, making it ideal for both small and large food-service establishments.

www.frontlineii.com



BABY KALE TURKEY CRANBERRY BISTRO BOWL

To capitalize on the benefits of kale and baby kale lettuce, Ready Pac Foods, Inc. has introduced the latest addition to their best-selling line of Bistro Bowl Salads, the Baby Kale Turkey Cranberry Bistro Bowl. This complete salad bowl is inspired by restaurant menu trends, featuring baby kale, diced turkey, sliced almonds, cranberries and red apple poppy seed dressing. The bowl launched this month and is available nationwide. Following extensive research into the health claims and household uses of last year's rising star, kale, Ready Pac is confident that their new bowl will generate even more loyalty among Bistro consumers.

www.readypac.com/product-category/bowl-salads



ROLTINI DEBUTS MEAT WRAPPED CHEESE STICKS

Volpi Foods, Inc. introduces Roltini, a gourmet snack made from the finest, hand-crafted salumi and quality mozzarella cheese. "Today's consumers are much more educated about their food and want all natural and wholesome snack choices," says Lorenza Pasetti, president of Volpi Foods. "Volpi is meeting the demand with authentic artisan meats wrapped cheese sticks, in convenient single-serve packaging." Established in 1902, Volpi Foods, Inc. is a St. Louis, MO-based, family-owned, artisan food company and the industry's oldest and finest producer of premium, hand-crafted specialty meat product.

www.volpifoods.com

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Advancing & Safeguarding the Refrigerated Foods Industry

by Jim Prevor, Editor-in-Chief

Contrarian Views On GMOs

Hostility to GMOs as a class is more political than scientific. Genetic modification is a technology, not a food, and, as with any technology, can be used in many different ways. For example, for as long as we have had domesticated agriculture, man has tried to select and breed for desirable traits. Almost all the produce items you see in a supermarket are hybrid varieties that bear little resemblance to the original wild plant. John Chapman, aka Johnny Appleseed, was famous for spreading apple orchards across the country, but those apples were used almost exclusively for hard cider – they were virtually inedible as a fruit unless baked with lots of sweetener.

Over years of breeding, we have crossed varieties to capture their most useful traits and so have delicious and healthy apples that are a joy to eat. So if one corn variety yields well but tastes awful, while another variety is sweet and delicious but yields very poorly, we have crossbred these plants in the hope of getting an optimal combination of traits. But conventional cross breeding can take decades and may never produce the desired outcome.

At its simplest, genetic modification is a technique that can be used to simply speed up the process of hybrid seed development. So instead of trying decades of crossbreeds, we identify the gene that causes “high yield” and put it in the plant that has the gene for sweetness. In the end, this plant would be genetically indistinguishable from what an optimal conventional breeding program would produce. It is extremely hard to see rationality in endorsing a result – the sweet high yield corn – if achieved expensively over many decades of conventional breeding but rejecting the same plant if the same genome came about through speedy and less expensive use of modern technology.

Indeed some of the opposition to GMOs is quite questionable. The organic community, for example, opposes GMOs. Indeed, if any consumer wants to avoid GMOs, buying Certified Organic Product is a simple way to do so, as the national standards prohibit the use of GMOs. Yet the organic community accepts hybrid seed and knows full well that since the 1940s, many conventional breeding efforts rely on blasting seeds with radiation or strong

chemicals in the hope of inducing a useful genetic mutation. The fact that the organic community accepts the idea that Mutation Breeding of this sort is perfectly acceptable and yet GMOs are not makes one suspect that marketing is guiding this effort more than anything else. Is it really true that the typical organic consumer would recoil at the thought a gene was removed from an heirloom organic white corn and placed in an heirloom organic yellow corn, yet this same consumer would be placid if the seed was blasted with radiation or toxic chemicals?

What about labeling? Even if the science opposing GMOs is weak, don't people have the “right to know” and so shouldn't labeling of GMOs be required? Traditionally we have not mandated labels just because someone might want to know something. After all, some people might want to know that the seed was developed through conventional hybridization or that the growers are opposed or are in favor of same-sex marriage. We have taken the position, though, that labeling requirements should generally be science-driven. So putting a notice on food “this is a GMO” or “this product is a result of conventional hybridization techniques” is the same thing as raising a red flag before consumers.

What about consumer rights? Well, any consumer can avoid consuming GMO products by purchasing organic products or by purchasing those products that are labelled as GMO-free. The whole business of throwing “rights” into the labeling discussion is awkward. After all, saying people have the “right” to know implies someone else somehow has acquired the obligation to inform. But why would that be the case? Don't producers have rights? Can't a consumer ask a producer if his product has GMOs, and can't the producer say he prefers to keep his ingredients secret and understands fully if the consumer prefers not to buy from him? How does the consumer's “right to know” take away a producer's right to hold his tongue?

DB



James S. Prevor

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by Lee Smith, Publisher

The Evolving Deli

The ability to change is an essential element for survival. Whether applied to birds, fish, mammals or business concepts, the inability to change leads to eventual extinction. And, extinction is generally a long and painful process.

Think about the transition from radio to television. In my mother's day, radio was a central part of family life. Sitting around the radio and intently listening to shows like "The Shadow" was as American as Norman Rockwell.

Then came TV, widely pronounced by radio stations as a short-lived gadget. Televisions cost 10 times what a radio cost. You could easily move a radio from place to place, but a TV set couldn't be moved. There were only three stations on TV and the picture was fuzzy. Getting good reception was an art that required massive amounts of tin foil on rabbit ear antennas.

As history has proven, television was the clear winner with the public. With each and every year, radio has had a tougher time surviving. Today, would you rather work in TV or radio? The consumer spoke but not everyone listened.

Supermarkets are in much the same boat.

Consumers are looking for fresh foods with clean labels. They are interested in organic, natural and local. They are purchasing more prepared foods with fewer ingredients. They are avoiding ingredients they cannot pronounce, and they are educated about potential problems with trans-fats, bleaching agents, preservatives and artificial colors and flavors. Interest in GMOs is growing, and there is little faith in industry to do what's "right" as opposed to what's expedient.

As an example, a local grocery store that is part of a highly respected chain just recently finished renovating an older store. The store did not, however, increase the size of the deli department or add refrigeration to the produce department. So there were end-of-season peaches and nectarines and their accompanying fruit flies on a non-refrigerated table. They looked good and, against my better judgment, I bought some. Talk about yuck. I threw every one away. The next time I visited, I asked the produce manager why they were on an unrefrigerated display and his answer was, "Our company doesn't want us to refrigerate fruit." I guess it's true, because I've never seen a refrigerated apple in the store.

Even though the store was a disaster for weeks during the renovation, the deli department was not touched either. Prepared food still consists of overcooked chicken, deli salads in cups, hummus, and left-over in-store packaged chicken.

This store will die a painful death and every reason except an antiquated product selection will be used to explain its demise.

The need to change has never been more critical or more difficult. Just like the radio stations of 50 years ago, traditional supermarkets are making money. To protect existing revenue while losing market share, they will look for ways to mitigate risk and maintain profitability while reducing store count and cutting back on service and labor.

Sales are being nickel-and-dimed by alternative sources. The local pharmacy offers snacks, dairy products and drinks. Club stores already offer limited selections of fresh prepared foods that are difficult to beat in price and quality. Costco's chicken, ribs, shrimp salad, pot pies and chicken soup are high sale drivers and consumer favorites.

Discounter and box stores offer low prices. It's hard to compete on price when there's a Wal-Mart or Target in town. When a retailer moves to pre-packed, price often becomes the only differentiator.

Specialty retailers like Whole Foods and other natural food stores offer more organics, transparency and top quality fresh prepared foods as well as excellent customer service complete with full-service departments.

The concept of being something to everyone will diminish in importance as everyone finds sources just around the corner and perfectly suited to their needs.

Traditional supermarkets and delis will continue to exist for a long time, but unless change is embraced with open arms, they will eventually crumble into a small secondary market.

Change doesn't have to be scary. It can be exciting and invigorating. Not every new innovation will be successful. There is a difference between the leading edge and the bleeding edge, and there are great examples of new concepts that work. Consumers are expressing the desire for more fresh foods, better labeling and products that are free from controversial additives. They want local and organic. They want to know where their food comes from and the stories behind them. They want to be involved and they are looking for someone to trust.

Putting the customer first always works, but customers' needs and desires change over time. Change with them and love the ride. Be brave.

DB



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Lee Smith".



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GMO Labeling: To Be Or Not To Be?



Debate Plays Out In States And U.S. Congress

It isn't clear what the impact will be on the marketplace, but proposed new food labeling laws with the inclusion of GMO ingredients has consumers and some key support groups feeling that they could be within reach of victory. The

debate continues to rage here and abroad: are GMOs safe to eat over the long term? Do consumers have the right to know exactly what is in the food they buy? If the ingredients are as safe as non-GMO, do they need to know?

BY LAURA WHITEMAN

Crops that have been genetically modified have been heralded as the answer to world hunger and equally vilified as 'Frankenfood.' Whatever you believe, both sides admit that their presence is so ubiquitous it would be very difficult to remove them from the food chain now. The real battle now being waged is focused on whether this information should be readily available to consumers and if these ingredients should be labeled.

Customers are increasingly concerned about the quality of their food and have an increasing appetite for labeled information about the origin of the foods they buy. Their quest for more information and transparency on the part of manufacturers has so far been fruitless and this lack of information is sending consumers in droves to the internet to do their own research; downloadable cell phone apps that give customers instant access to extensive databases of product ingredients are influencing purchasing decisions in real time. But who decides what information is truthful, complete and necessary?

Can a little information be dangerous?

In the food-labeling debate more than 90 percent of consumers polled in surveys, say they want a lot more information about GMO ingredients on food labels in order to make educated choices about the foods to buy. The use of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO's), also called Genetically Engineered (GE's) in the biotech world, divides food researchers and farmers, manufacturers and consumers. They're everywhere on supermarket shelves, but without a clear directive regarding the inclusion of GMO ingredients on labels, the consumer has only a vague idea what is in the food.

More than 80 percent of all processed foods on store shelves contain corn starch, high fructose corn syrup, corn oil, canola oil, soybean oil, soybean flour, soy lecithin or cottonseed oil that come from genetically modified crops. Farmers have been raising crops to improve yield or taste throughout history, but their efforts relied on natural breeding processes.

Today, GMOs are plants or animals, which have been genetically altered with DNA from other organisms, bacteria or viruses to make them more resistant to disease or more tolerant of herbicides. Some plants are even genetically altered so they emit pesticides to deter or harm

pests. Can these crops also harm people who eat them? Can GMOs harm the animals that consume them, and therefore compromise the entire food chain?

Infused in Controversy

National news reports detailing efforts to enact labeling laws have already undermined many consumers' confidence in GMO foods. The consumers' grassroots movement to clearly label GMO ingredients did, however, gain real momentum in 2013 with the introduction of a high-profile bill by Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-California entitled the Genetically Engineered Food Right-to-Know Act.



While this bipartisan-supported bill is currently under review by a congressional committee, its path to becoming law promises to be a rough road, primarily because there are so many "big players," both industrial and corporate, which oppose such labeling and could invest considerable sums of money to defeat it.

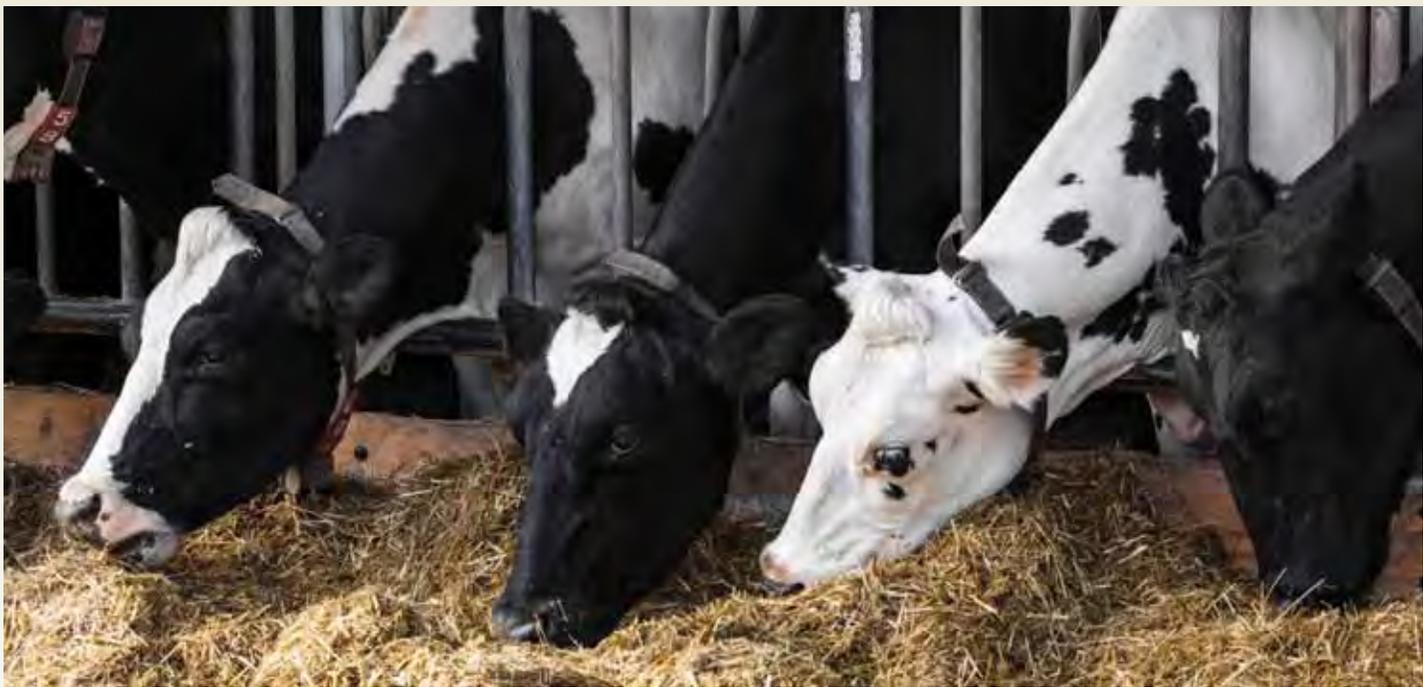
State measures proposed in 2012 and 2013 in California and Washington demonstrate that all elected officials will have a fine line to walk on the subject of GMO labeling to please both constituents and major donors. Both of these state bills were defeated by slim

majorities, and many believe the sheer might of the millions of dollars spent (\$46M in California and \$22M in Washington) by biotech leaders such as Monsanto and DuPont, and food and beverage companies such as Coca-Cola and Nestle, were instrumental in the bills' defeat. Pre-elections polls in both states had shown a majority of voters wanted labels on genetically modified food. But a last minute push by opponents to GMO labeling argued new labeling laws would raise food costs, that the laws contained too many exemptions, and were confusing.

Not content to wait until new federal legislation passes; pro-labeling advocates

have already redoubled their efforts this year by laying the groundwork for passage of bills in 25 states. Connecticut and Maine already passed legislation in 2013 to require GMO labeling, although these laws won't go into effect until neighboring states adopt similar measures.

Opponents to GMO labeling have a variety of reasons for refusing to endorse new measures. A key argument is that non-GMO labels would be misleading because they would imply the food is safer, or in some way better than foods that are GMO or are made with GMO's. However, the Food and Drug



Administration (FDA) does not approve genetically-engineered foods as safe, and as there is currently no requirement to conduct any safety studies of GMO foods, the FDA only states that GMO ingredients are substantially the same as non-GMO.

The patent holder voluntarily provides any information used as the basis of this decision, including independent food safety research conducted on GMO foods, to the FDA. But even the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), a prominent advocate for nutrition policy and a surprising opponent to GMO labeling on the grounds that GE foods do not present either safety (i.e. allergies) or nutrition concerns, has called for the FDA to set up a mandatory pre-market approval process and verify that the GMO crops are safe for human consumption.

Some advocates of labeling are far less concerned with food safety arguments for GMO labeling than they are with the damage to the environment from the toxic chemicals used on the modified crops in the field. Because many GMO crops are created in order to make the crops resistant to the herbicides used to kill the weeds that grow around them, many consumers are demanding GMO information in order to choose products that won't harm the environment.

Herbicide use has grown by millions of pounds since GMO crops were introduced in 1996 and most of this increase can be traced to glyphosate, the active ingredient in Monsanto's Roundup her-

bicide. With increased use of herbicides, also comes the fear that weeds resistant to existing herbicides will sprout up to create a treadmill which will require greater doses of chemicals or even more toxic methods to defeat a new breed of weeds.

Nuanced Argument

The FDA's position since 1992 has been that GMO ingredients are "substantially equivalent" to those in other conventionally produced foods. While the 'six of one, half-a-dozen of the other' view by the FDA, of food produced using GMO ingredients and of food produced without GMO ingredients, will certainly be queried during the passage of the current federal bill under consideration in Congress, one of the most vocal opponents to labeling legislation at the state level is the Grocery Marketing Association (GMA).

The GMA opposed mandatory labels fearing a 50-state patchwork of differing laws advocates that the FDA, being the most qualified food safety expert, decide on food safety and labeling laws on a national level. The GMA is requesting the FDA develop regulations so manufacturers can voluntarily make claims about the absence of GMOs, and permit other manufacturers to voluntarily choose to label products that contain GMOs.

If the FDA states GMO products are equivalent to non-GMO then the assumption could be that the food is just as safe to eat. But many disagree, particularly in the absence of any long-term

studies. The European Union is particularly opposed to GMO crops and last year, bowing to fierce opposition, Monsanto withdrew all requests for GMO crops in the European Union, except for one brand of GE Maize. Eight of the crops Monsanto sought approval for had been declared safe for consumption by the European Food Safety Authority, but the political maelstrom surrounding the approval process of GMO crops forced Monsanto to revise its European strategy.

Overall, some 64 countries around the world now require GMO food labeling.

Natural vs. Organic

The overwhelming success of products sold which bear labels marked third-party certified, non-GMO product and organic, has garnered much attention since the FDA's draft guidelines issued in 2001 gave manufacturers the option to choose to label their products in this way. But while organic food cannot contain GMO ingredients since USDA organic standards became law in the 1990's, foods that are labeled "natural" have not been strictly or even clearly defined. This natural label 'limbo' may not change for years, even after federal courts seeking to resolve pending class action cases requested the FDA determine whether natural foods can contain GMOs. This January, the FDA declined the request saying it could only make a determination in the context of an official regulation or formal guidance, which would be all-encompassing for natural ingredients and products.

In addition to “natural” foods that may contain GMOs, some of the foods that are GMO and are found on shelves today are:

Milk – A GE hormone called recombinant bovine growth hormone (rBGH) that increases milk production in dairy cows can be found in about 40 percent of dairy products available today, including cheese and ice cream.

Corn – Sweet corn, destined for tables everywhere, was exclusively non-GMO until Monsanto’s first sweet corn crop arrived in a few retailers’ produce aisles last year. Up until then, 90 percent of all corn grown in the U.S. was genetically modified, but those crops were primarily used as animal feed or ethanol or in processed foods — all foods containing high fructose corn syrup, such as cookies, snacks, chips, soups, condiments and breakfast cereals.

Canola Oil – More than 90 percent of the U.S. canola crop is genetically modified. In some areas of the country, the crop is growing wild. Canola is used to make cooking oil that is widely used by consumers, restaurants and in food-service.

Soy – Most of the name brand soy milk and tofu sold in supermarkets is not

GMO, but 94 percent of all U.S. soy crops are GMO and these crops are used in products that contain the emulsifier lecithin, notably candy.

Papaya – U.S. Hawaiian papaya was genetically engineered to resist the ringspot virus and this GMO crop now accounts for about 80 percent of the papayas sold. It is currently the only GMO fruit available for sale in stores. The USDA has recently approved planting of GM papayas in Florida.

Sugar Beets – Products that do not specify “pure cane sugar” probably contain some combination of cane sugar and GMO sugar beets. Ninety-five percent of the sugar beet crop in the U.S. is GMO.

Voting with their wallets

Consumers want choices, but also like convenience and the availability of consistently fresh products for purchase. What is becoming clear is many of these consumers are now willing to pay premium prices for greater transparency in food labeling. While numerous organizations agree with consumers that a national standard for the labeling of non-GMO and GMO products is the solution to an increasingly divided debate,

the prolonged and continuing absence of FDA and USDA leadership in the labeling debate leaves a lot of room for both consumers and retailers to take the lead.

Whole Foods Market has already thrown the gauntlet down. The Austin, TX-based retailer has set a deadline of 2018 for labels showing GMO ingredients on all products sold in its U.S. and Canadian stores. In a message on the Whole Foods Market website, the company recognizes that it would be impossible to prohibit all GMO foods in store, but by working with suppliers to label the ingredients in foods, the Whole Foods Market customer will be able to make purchasing decisions that reflect their own beliefs about GMO’s and the environment.

Concurrently, the push for state-by-state labeling laws will continue. If measures already proposed in 25 states are passed, manufacturers and other retailers will be much more receptive and enthusiastic in the passage of federal legislation on GMO labeling. And perhaps the FDA and the USDA will act on their own without any prodding to “do the right thing” and define GMO guidelines for food labeling before being ordered. **DB**



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Creating a Deli Destination

With the proper selection and merchandising methods, supermarket delis can profit from the soup category even during warmer months.

BY LISA WHITE



PHOTO COURTESY OF KETTLE CUISINE

The secret to soup selling at retail is to know who the competition is, in other words, deli executives need to think like restaurateurs.

This is because, in the increasingly cutthroat soup segment, restaurants, not other retailers, are what deli departments are up against.

Between July 2012 and July 2013, soup servings in U.S. restaurants grew by 3 percent to 1.6 billion units, according to The NPD Group Inc., a Port Washington, NY-based research firm.

"In foodservice, soup has overtaken salad as the number one appetizer," says Bob Sewall, executive vice president of sales and marketing at Blount Fine Foods, based in Fall River, MA. "Although soup sales [are increasing exponentially] in fine dining and casual restaurants, supermarket deli departments are doing a tremendous job in [luring

these customers away]."

[Retail] soup sales experienced a 14.3 percent dollar sales growth and 12 percent growth in volume in the 52 weeks ending April 27, 2013, according to Chicago, IL-based Nielsen Perishables Group, a fresh food consultancy.

"Many stores are creating sections or walls of soup, becoming destinations for these products," says Sewall.

In looking at the total U.S. soup category, ready-to-serve wet soup and condensed wet soup represented nearly 60 percent of sales between 2007 and 2012, according to the International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association's (IDDBA) 2014 What's in Store report. Frozen soup experienced the largest growth in that period at 39 percent.

Selection Sells

Deli department soup selections have evolved from the standard chicken noodle and clam chowder to more innovative and

decadent varieties, despite the fact that, from 2008 to 2012, the soup category saw a decrease of nearly one-third in the number of new product launches, according to Mintel's Soup — U.S. study.

Fortun's Finishing Touch Sauces, based in Kirkland, WA, recently expanded its business to include soups for this reason.

Run by the former owners of Stock Pot Soups, a fresh retail soup concept that is now a part of Campbell's, the company expanded its fish finishing sauces to include soup after receiving requests from former retail customers.

"We didn't expect to get back into it, but we were seeing a commodity-based soup segment that was complacent," says Mary T. Shepard, Fortun's director of sales. "The quality wasn't there."

Although soup appeals to most age groups, it's the 25-34-year-olds, followed by 18-24-year-olds, [who are the primary consumers], according to IDDBA's report.

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It's this younger demographic that is more discriminating in terms of quality, ingredients and variety.

"I see the Millennials are making a big difference [where soup selection is concerned]," says Shepard. "As a result, international and ethnic flavors are on trend. These consumers are more adventurous, but still want the classic soup types."

Fortun recently launched a fresh asparagus soup and lentil and sausage variety.

In addition to global flavors, younger soup consumers tend to look for twists on classic favorites.

Chelsea, MA-based Kettle Cuisine will be unveiling four new soups this fall that have been created in response to these trends. The Tuscan Sausage & White Bean Soup includes sweet Italian sausage and cannellini beans in a vegetable stock with tomatoes, kale, savory cabbage and aged Parmesan cheese. Albondigas combines meatballs, potatoes and tomatoes in a chicken stock infused with traditional Mexican aromatics and a touch of fresh lime juice.

Kettle Cuisine's Roasted Red Pepper & Gouda Bisque has a puree of roasted red peppers, tomatoes and sautéed onions in a blend of smoky Gouda and sour cream with fresh spinach and a hint of paprika. The company's new Black Bean soup includes slow-cooked black beans, red peppers, roasted sweet corn and diced green chilies in a puree of tomatoes with fresh-squeezed orange juice and a splash of lime.

Retailers and consumers are less interested in gimmick marketing tactics where soup is concerned. Instead, people are seeking more transparency when it comes to ingredients and the sourcing of food.

"When marketing soups, it's more effective to detail the ingredients and the manufacturer's relationship with purveyors," says Laura Merritt, Kettle Cuisine's director of corporate marketing. "For instance, we highlight the fact that the carrots in our chicken noodle soup are grown on a family farm operated by two brothers who still walk the carrot fields."

Since sustainability and locally-grown products remain top trends for 2014, highlighting soups with these attributes can be effective.

Also, because sustainable and humanely-produced foods are becoming more important to a broader demographic, soups with these ingredients command a higher price.

Utilizing QR codes at the point of sale is one method that provides consumers with the opportunity to learn more about a soup's origin. By scanning the digital image or water mark with a smart phone, people can learn more about the food's story from field to bowl or ocean to bowl. This information also can include suggested garnishes and pairings.

On the flip side to premium products, stores that create a signature program with private label soups can capture consumers seeking value options.

Blount Fine Foods offers private label cups as well as Legal Sea Foods and Panera Bread lines. The company will be launching three new Legal Sea Foods' flavors and four Panera flavors, as well as a line of 10-ounce grab-and-go Panera soups this year.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BLOUNT FINE FOODS

"Private label soups offer quality with a value per ounce cost as well as more regional flavors," says Sewall.

Creating a Destination

Soup programs vary by store in terms of offerings and sizes. While some include two hot soups that rotate daily, others may offer up to eight.

The more options, the better, since increasing soup sales can lead to higher profit margins in the deli.

"Stores have to realize that soup is very profitable when properly merchandised," says Shepard. "Even small chains that increase bowl sales by five to 10 a day can make a lot of money."

The deli is in a perfect position to appeal to consumers' desires for offering healthy, convenient and customizable soup solutions, according to IDDBA's report. This could be provided with kits or soup ingredient bars that include pre-cut vegetables, meats and other mix-ins. Stores also can package refrigerated soups under a private label brand. This delivers a customizable approach.

Soup photos on labels and different color packaging denoting different soup characteristics, like organic or gluten free, are also effective marketing tools.

"People who eat soup are looking for variety," says Sewall. "Our best retail customers provide availability of different flavors in a wall soup display."

Here, lines can be categorized by flavor, brands and healthier options. This is not only more convenient for consumers to source what they are looking for, but also provides an attractive display that encourages impulse buys.

Although hot soup programs can require increased labor for maintaining the area and keeping kettles full, it also provides a canvas for selling the product.

"Including nutritional information adjacent to the soup kettles, including callouts on soup attributes and ingredients, plus any promotional specials, [is key]," advises Sewall. "Retailers are doing a better job providing this information and educating customers."

Like restaurants, retailers can offer soup combo specials with sandwiches and other items to drive sales. Delis also can cross merchandise soup in conjunction with other departments, which attracts customers who may not have otherwise considered the purchase.

"Consumers are more aware of healthy, clean ingredients and this is where the focus needs to be in the soup segment," says Shepard. "That's what retailers and consumers are looking for."

DB

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Going Upscale

Is artisan salami the new prosciutto?

BY KEITH LORIA

As consumers look beyond the widely popular prosciutto for the next palate-challenging salumi, or cured meat, many retail deli executives already have begun to focus on artisan salami. With a broader selection and improved marketing techniques, the upscale sibling to the longtime staple, salami, could fill even more of the growing demand for high-end product.

To help achieve that goal, delis are showcasing more artisanal, upmarket varieties with old world flavors right alongside the

many brands of conventional salami consumers have favored for decades.

"There's a lot more knowledge around different types and quality of salami and uses outside of just slicing and serving on a cracker," says Valeria Fiorito, associate director of marketing at Columbus Foods in San Francisco. "We now are seeing it on chefs' menus at restaurants, and people are more comfortable using it in recipes. It's a similar path prosciutto took a couple years ago when it went beyond being found only in specialty stores to now being [available] in

almost any grocery store."

And as the demand for authenticity in the category grows, Fiorito has seen increased requests from customers for its Artisan Collection with traditional salami like Finocchiona made with wild fennel seeds.

The Next Level

Adisa Kalkan, marketing manager of John Volpi & Co., Inc., in St. Louis, MO, explains that salami, like prosciutto, can't be rushed in the curing process, and unlike prosciutto, the casing can be a great way to give



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salami unique characteristics.

“Salami can go a long way; you don’t need a lot of it to experience the flavor and create amazing picks and bites,” he says. “Prosciutto is very simple when it comes to a flavor profile — nothing but sea salt is used. Salami, on the other hand, can have unique flavor combinations. Ingredients like toasted fennel seeds and Hungarian smoky paprika create amazing salami flavors when mixed with minced meat and stuffed in casing.”

As artisanal salami is trending right now, deli buyers and chefs are finding new ways to showcase the product.

“In moderation, it can be a flavorful addition to a salad or pasta,” says Jennifer Johnson, director of marketing for Olli Salumeria, based in Mechanicsville, VA. “Everything is handcrafted and becomes something of a delicacy versus what salami started out as. It’s really interesting that it’s now become a very special item instead of a necessity.”

According to industry experts, the key to bringing artisan salami to that next level is education. Even though consumers are much more knowledgeable today, there is still a perception that salami is an indulgence instead of an ingredient in meals.

“Salami that is produced from antibiotic-free, noncommodity sources — that is, family farms — is a class unto itself that already enjoys upscale status,” says Paul Bertolli, founder and chief executive of Fra’ Mani

Handcrafted Foods in Berkeley, CA. “Other distinguishing attributes of this class are handmade products such as Fra’ Mani’s that are stuffed into natural casings, hand tied and subjected to a lengthy ripening and aging process to develop maximal flavor.”

All Natural

Thierry Farges, president and co-owner of Transatlantic Foods, Inc., headquartered in New York City, says the trend among artisans is a move toward the natural category, meaning no added hormones, no artificial nitrates and no preservatives.

“Hogs are typically humanely raised on small farms and enjoy a vegetarian diet,” he says. “Today’s consumers want to know their food is hand-crafted. We are grabbing rustic-looking sausages and tasting and smelling the farm-y flavors and scents you’d find in a small Corsican village.”

Transatlantic Foods produces charcuterie using traditional techniques: smelling and touching to determine ripeness; stuffing into animal casings; and tying with natural string.

Fiorito also believes that natural is the biggest buzz in the salami industry right now, and Columbus Foods has listened to customer requests to beef up the category.

“Consumers continue to ask for more transparency to the ingredients in all their foods, whether it’s organic, natural, no artificial ingredients, etc.,” she says. “We intro-

duced our Naturals line to respond to those consumer demands.”

Organics in Vogue

Johnson says many upscale customers are searching for strictly organics, which is why Olli Salumeria started selling its organic salami a few years back.

“When you look at the data, there are certain customers out there who will only eat organic, period. People perceive organic as healthier,” she says. “All of our organic pork comes from pigs that are humanely pasture-raised and free of growth agents and antibiotics. We don’t use nitrates or nitrites in any of our products, so we produce a really clean label.”

When it comes to organics, Bertolli does see the trend continuing to grow, but adds that sourcing organic meat remains an issue.

On Display

In most delis, artisanal salumi or charcuterie falls into the specialty category. As such, most deli departments push it to the forefront with special signage that reflects the store’s particular health-oriented or “green” statement.

“Verbiage such as natural, hormone-free, nitrate-free, local, environmentally sustainable, small batch, and environmentally friendly invite consumers for another look,” says Farges. “We suggest producing recipe/serving suggestions. Use natural

fabrics and colors — kraft paper, burlap, and jute — in your displays. Make a pointed difference between the traditional black/red/gold items and these upscale brands.”

Most suppliers try to help deli owners by providing recipe cards, signage materials, and handouts for specials, such as wine or cheese/charcuterie pairings or product-specific sales.

To attract further customer interest, Farges suggests peeling some of the salami casing back and leaving it attached. He also says full displays with one stacked on top of each other will draw attention to the meat.

“Use point-of-purchase materials on the countertop. The casing is a tip-off to its specialness: play it up using shelf-talkers, POP recipes and photos,” he says. “Passive as well as active demos are always successful and can be tailored to special occasions, such as the Super Bowl, back-to-school sandwiches, summer picnics, non-perishable travel snacks, etc. Turn end pieces into chowders, jambalayas, rice salads and other takeout dishes — and make sure customers know what’s in the dish.”

Volpi’s Kalkan notes that since salami is an impulse buy, discounts or circulars are not the best way to capture customer interest

and increase sales. Displays, cross merchandising, product selection, placement, pairing and sampling are his tips on ways for retailers to initiate that impulse buy.

“Replicas of prosciutto, salami, and cacciatore hanging in the deli area will help create that Italian deli look and Volpi offers free replicas in our retail and distributor programs,” says Kalkan. “Permanent shipper units and wooden crates are great ways to create beautiful displays, cross merchandise and place products throughout the store floor to maximize that dollar per square foot.”

Bertolli believes it’s important to offer in-store tastings or even add a sign that says, “Ask for a taste.”

“My recommendation to deli operators is to merchandise products such as these separately from the others and by so doing, make it clear to consumers what the choice is,” he



says. “We offer back-of-counter posters, on-counter POP and static-cling signage for the outside of the case. As well, we offer branded wooden boxes for display of our small formats.”

And don’t forget those visuals, experts add. Fiorito says Columbus Foods provides brochures and recipe cards that use salami as an ingredient beyond just sandwiches because appetizing pictures of dishes incorporating the featured product is an easy way to grab the consumer’s attention. **DB**

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BEEF: THERE'S GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS



Prices rising but so is appetite for high-end products

BY BOB JOHNSON

Two somewhat contradictory trends exist for deli executives to ruminate as they manage their roast beef program.

The first is a strong trend toward much higher beef prices that began late this winter but could be with us for a while.

“There has been a tremendous spike in the cost of beef in the last 30 days; prices have hit historic highs,” says Jim Dickman, chief

executive of Charlie’s Pride Meats, Vernon, CA. “Overall beef prices have gone 7 to 20 percent higher in the last 30 days. There has been around a 10 to 15 percent increase in the cost of roast beef.”

Although short-term weather issues are impacting beef prices, as always, the sticker shock this year raises the issue of whether we will ever return to the beef prices and supplies we enjoyed not long ago.

“One of the most telling signs is the herds have been at as low a level as they have been since the 1950s, and we have many more people in the U.S. This may be the new price level for beef like \$3 to \$4 is the new level for gas prices, because there are fewer cattle and folks are going to have to pay more for beef,” says Dickman.

The second, seemingly contradictory, trend is that the worst is behind us in terms of the economic downturn, and consumers are back to looking for higher-end beef products.

“Over the past few years we’ve seen most retailers offering a premium or super premium deli beef line in Certified Angus Beef or USDA Choice for their private brand. That trend continues. Merchandising ‘low sodium’ or ‘97 percent fat free’ for example are key bullet points that today’s consumer is looking for,” says Bruce Belack, executive vice president for sales and marketing at Vincent Giordano Corporation, Philadelphia, PA.

The head scratcher for deli managers is how to navigate these two contradictory trends, which both seem like they will be with us a while.

Show Them the Good Stuff

Even though they remain relative luxuries, the highest-end roast beef products are enjoying steady increases and should continue to enjoy increases despite price pressure.

“It is suggested about four percent of the population currently shops for all natural and organic food products. This category is rapidly growing but only a small percentage of the population is buying,” says Belack.

Greg Lake, national sales manager at Dietz & Watson, Philadelphia, PA, says, “We have a very clean label. For many of our roast beefs, yes, the healthy aspects of lean roast beef can be merchandised. Our beef is low in fat, lower in sodium, contains no trans fats, is high in protein, has no carbs and like all of our items, we never use MSG.”

The trend toward craving special deli beef products figures to stay even as prices jump.

“People who are choosing to eat beef want a better eating experience. There is more consumption of the higher-end beef products than two or three years ago,” says Dickman. “There is a major upswing on the quality of the beef product people want; that is a major trend. Three or four years ago the large buyers were looking for more economical beef. Within the last year they have started looking for quality, for more USDA Choice roast beef, compared

to no roll, or non-graded.”

Deli beef showed slight increases last year, according to International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association statistics.

Service deli beef sales moved from \$689 million in 2012 to just more than \$700 million last year, but year over year fourth quarter sales increased a bit more significantly from \$170.9 million to \$176.7 million.

Last year’s difference was largely due to higher prices as volume only increased from

78.5 million pounds to 78.6 million pounds. But volume sales picked up at the end of the year, and there was a 200,000-pound increase for the final quarter alone.

“Regular roast beef is down half a point in pounds compared to a year ago. Bold flavored beef such as Cajun, is down 20 percent. Price is a big indicator. Beef is up in cost again two percent compared to last year,” says Lake.

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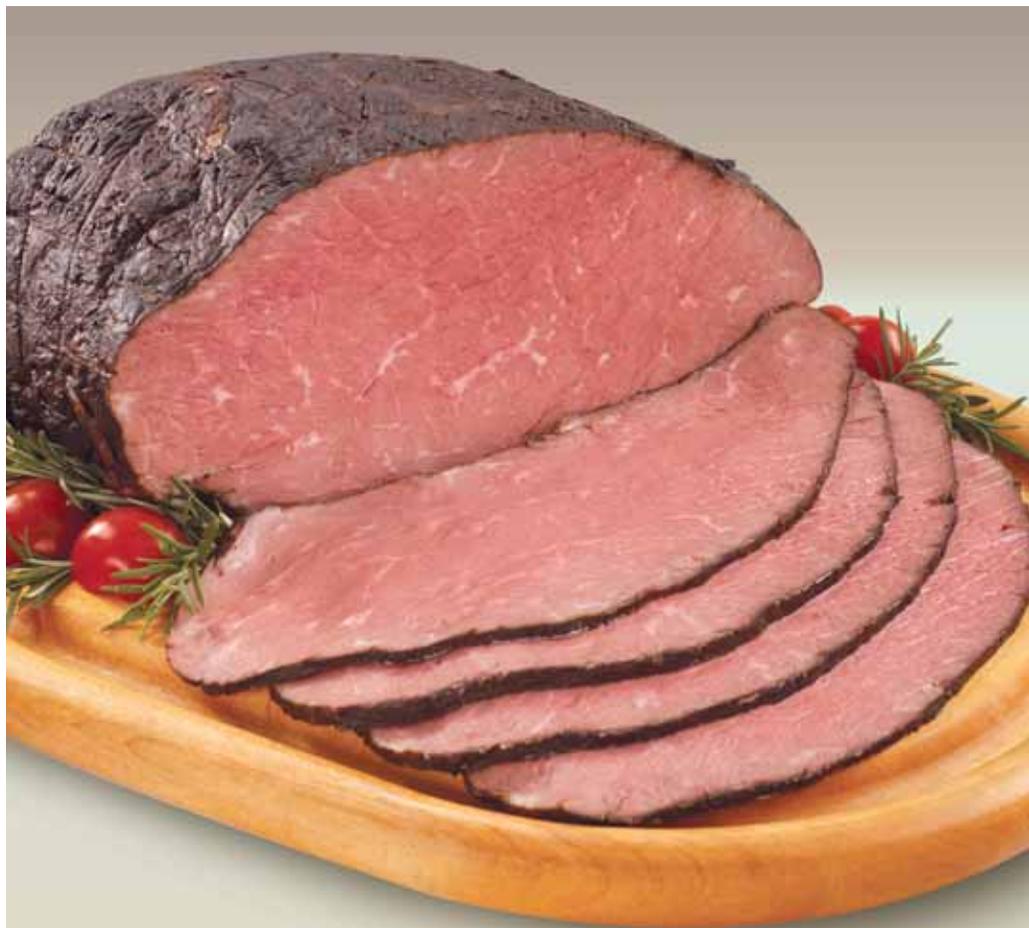
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Sticker Shock

Merchandising roast beef will soon be complicated by customer sticker shock.

But the beef program can take some comfort from the fact that competing meats are also running into high prices.

"Pork and poultry also have gone way up," says Charlie's Pride's Dickman.

One strategy for dealing with high roast beef prices is to concentrate on quality sandwiches, in which the beef is just one ingredient.

"The current very high beef prices are affecting sales in most retail supermarkets. However, a good sandwich program within

the store can help spike sales. Though beef is high, the sandwich makers are still offering a quality beef sandwich at a reasonable price," says Vincent Giordano's Belack.

You can use other ingredients to make the sandwich a special eating occasion.

"Put the beef in a different recipe. Maybe have ciabatta bread and good olives to make an Italian roast beef sandwich. Make it an exciting event," advises Dickman.

Another merchandising strategy is to emphasize the high-end flavor of the meat.

"We are finding that in general, trends point toward 'flavor first,' with consumers

seeking out products that taste true to their origins. Spicy continues to be the number one flavor trend, with sweet and spicy also growing in popularity," says Sven Freybe, president and chief executive of Freybe Gourmet Foods, Langley, BC. "We are certainly continuing to see strong growth for our Naturally Freybe product line-up. Low in fat, no preservatives, no hormones, and no nitrites."

Another strategy is special promotions to make roast beef affordable to the middle class or even lower middle class — to get them in the habit of coming to the deli section.

"Retailers in an urban store with a limited-means demographic offering roast beef that can sell for \$5.99/lb everyday and \$4.99 on sale have much more flexibility than the major traditional supermarkets who have specific profit margin targets and higher shrink. The retailer offering roast beef at \$5.99 is working on a very low margin looking to spike the dollar sales at the register," says Belack.

The next few months likely spell difficult negotiations between suppliers and deli buyers as they haggle over the "new normal" for a pound of roast beef.

"The challenge for manufacturers is struggling to pass through the increase. There will be a fair amount of push back from retailers, but everyone knows there has been a 7 to 20 percent increase in beef prices," says Dickman. "Do periodic price specials if possible."

When it comes down to it, producers and retailers must find new levels of cooperation.

"It's still a tough economy, so we work aggressively to provide added value to our partners as well as the end user. Price promotion, other consumer promotions, attractive and useful point of sale... these are all ways that we as a manufacturer work to help our customers increase deli sales," offers Dietz & Watson's Lake.

Retailers and producers also will have to explain to consumers why roast beef is more expensive, and why it is worth it.

"It is up to both the retailer and manufacturer to educate the consumer on what goes into an excellent roast beef and provide the justification for the higher price point," says Freybe Gourmet Foods' Freybe. "There are obviously limits to how much consumers will pay, and in order to command a high price, the product needs to be visually appealing and fresh. Also, the reason for the higher price needs to be clear, whether it be grass fed, hormone free or from a distinguished local farmer." **DB**

The Quarter Billion Dollar Pizza Challenge

Build Programs Around Fresh and Innovative Crusts

BY BOB JOHNSON



PHOTO COURTESY OF STONEFIRE AUTHENTIC FLATBREADS

The volume of deli pizza sales makes it worth the time and effort to grab a piece of that quarter billion dollar pie, and the place to begin is with distinctive dough.

“You have to have a great tasting crust to build your program around. The toppings, sauce and other factors are pretty basic in comparison. It all starts with the crust and you don’t have to make it fresh ‘in store’ and eat up a lot of labor doing it,” says Perry Abbenante, chief marketing officer and general manager at Stonefire Authentic Flatbreads, Concord, Ontario.

The Crust of the Matter

Deli pizza sales remain a significant quarter of a billion dollars annually even though

stagnating, according to statistics from International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association senior education coordinator Alan Hiebert.

Volume increased a scant 2.3 million pounds in 2013 compared to 2012. Deli pizza dollar totals were up even more modestly, from \$249 million in 2012 to a tick under \$251 million last year.

One way to stand out in the crowded pizza field is to offer crusts with flavors that complement the toppings.

“Right now there is a trend toward flavored crusts. Hot and spicy is popular; so is multi-grain. Herb flavor goes with white meat, chicken and broccoli,” says Jim Viti, vice president for sales and marketing at Delorio’s Frozen, Inc., Utica, NY. “You’re accentuating the toppings with the dough.

There’s a trend toward flavor profiles that are unique, including ethnic flavors.”

There is also a more general trend toward crusts that are in some way more nutritious.

“The typical deli customer is from a medium income household, and that fits the demographic for health awareness. In the last 48 months, we’ve been asked about our product because there are fewer additive ingredients in our crust,” says Kyle Cash, director of marketing at Drayton Enterprises, Fargo, ND. “Promoting as much ‘all natural’ as possible is probably the best bet, with all the health awareness these days.”

Marc Losurdo, president of Losurdo Foods, Hackensack, NJ, is also witnessing a trend. “Customers are looking for more

multi-grain dough. It started two or three years ago.”

Losurdo sells dough to distributors, some of whom sell to retail delis.

Evidence is mounting that the pizza-buying public is ready for more nutritious choices.

“Our research indicates that consumers of all ages are looking for healthier alternatives — without sacrificing taste or convenience. Our conversations with grocery buyers, foodservice managers and others show that retailers are moving in the same direction to satisfy their customers,” says Brad Sterl, president and chief executive of Rustic Crust, Pittsfield, NH.

Sterl advises letting consumers know you have pizza without preservatives, additives or ingredients you cannot pronounce or comprehend.

“Serving a quality pizza — a quality crust with healthful toppings — doesn’t have to be expensive, certainly isn’t difficult and can have a big impact on the bottom line,” he says.

Recently, this trend toward healthier crusts has gained momentum not just with consumers but with delis, too.

“We are doing more of our business with delis than before,” says Drayton’s Cash.

“About 48 to 60 months ago we started getting more calls from delis. In the last 12 months we started making more sales.”

Another option that may or may not be worth choosing is gluten-free crust.

“Gluten-free is very popular right now, although it is not necessarily appropriate for all venues. In deciding whether or not to have a gluten-free offering, the retailer should assess its clientele as well as its ability to safely handle the gluten-free product,” advises Liz Hertz, marketing director at Burke Corporation, Nevada, IA, citing cross-contamination as a potential issue.

Many suppliers caution about contamination because “gluten-free” crusts may not only come from a facility that makes other dough with gluten, but may even share equipment with gluten-containing dough.

And with a whole universe of crust options, experts say to choose a few that can be done well with the modest size of a



PHOTO COURTESY OF STEFANO FOODS

deli pizza program.

“Given the scope of most retail pizza operations, I would suggest that retailers select one or possibly two popular crust types,” says Hertz. “A little research can help in the selection process. Look at the type of crust offered in local pizzerias for an indicator of local consumer preference, or request assistance from distributors and manufacturers. Gluten-free is popular, but the operator needs to look at their ability to manage the entire production of the gluten-free pizza — from sourcing of ingredients to assembly to storage and baking. If gluten-free is an impor-

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tant part of the retail side of the operation, a gluten-free pizza might be a good idea," she adds.

"Whole wheat, thin or thick, gluten-free and deep-dish crusts are all options, making it even harder for retailers to make their own crust," says Stonefire Authentic Flatbreads' Abbenante. "How can a retailer decide? It's hard to be all things to all people. I think you need to stick to a certain style. Offering a thin or thicker crust based on your market preference is a good strategy. Offering a whole-wheat version of one of those is fairly easy to do. Gluten free is very tricky because of cross contamination."

A retailer's most serious competition may come from made-at-home pizzas from frozen and homemade doughs.

"Sometimes the newest things are actually the originals," says Alan Hamer, vice president of Stefano Foods, Charlotte, NC. "Consumers' best option for great crust is the use of pizza dough to make pizza at home. At the very least, it's a fun family activity. And at best, anyone can have pizzeria quality pizza without leaving the house, if they start with the right dough. It is virtually impossible for a twice-baked crust to equal the eating quality of a fully fermented hand stretched pizza — even if it is not perfectly round."

Another concern for retail chains is the amount of in-store labor required for high quality and consistent product.

"There are ready-to-bake crusts that perform very well. In fact, Stonefire pizza crusts are the fastest growing ready to bake pizza crusts in total deli pizza sales and we think that the sales increases are driven by the high quality authentic nature of the product," says Abbenante.

Delorio's Viti suggests, "Frozen dough is the next best thing to making it in the store. If you make dough at five different stores, you can have five different products. This gives you better consistency. We make the dough here, and flash freeze it. The retailer puts it in the cooler overnight. When they pull the crusts out the next morning they are refrigerated, and they put their toppings on them and bake."

Variety Brings a Piece of Pie

With readily available international foods, delis can create an Italian section that pizza houses cannot rival.

Research shows this advantage in variety can give the deli a leg up on the competition in merchandising.

"Viability of the pizza section is greatly enhanced by merchandising additional Italian section items. By having calzones, stromboli and garlic knots adjacent to the pizza display,

the section offers options for all household sizes and age groups," says Hamer. "Additional Italian deli items add continued interest and choices for shoppers who can mix and match to keep pizza night interesting for their families."

Some consumers have grown more discriminating about the quality of ingredients in the topping.

"With the growth of food, cooking-driven blogs and online media there is much more information for the consumer to digest in terms of creative recipes and pizza topping ideas. We see trends in at-home cooking and entertaining, and pizza continues to be a staple in homes across the country," says Abbenante.

It is worth taking the time to think through the ingredients that make for standout pizza toppings to appeal to your customers.

"The ever-increasing quality of pre-cooked toppings for pizza is great for retail pizza operations. Currently, operators can buy toppings in a variety of sizes, shapes and flavors to meet the needs of just about any pizza concept," says Burke Corporation's Hertz. "In particular, some of the newer toppings feature a coarser grind and the irregular look of sausage that has been hand-

pinched directly onto a pizza, while offering all of the convenience of a fully cooked product. In general, traditional sausage flavor profiles are most popular, but some operators appreciate being able to expand their menu with chorizo or taco-flavored meat crumbles."

You can count on suppliers to provide the particulars that lend your pizzas pizzazz.

"Quality begins with ingredient management. Select ingredients that taste and look good both individually and when combined on a pizza. Distributors and manufacturers would be happy to work with the operator to do product cuttings to identify just the right product for their concept," says Hertz. "However, the initial cutting may not tell the entire story. Operators need to choose suppliers that can consistently deliver on the desired attributes — especially on appearance and freshness of the flavors."

Like the inviting smell of a pepperoni-and-cheese wafting through the store, a quality pizza program, if effectively promoted, can be a draw for the entire deli department.

"I think investing more in the pizza program helps," says Drayton's Cash. "Invest in advertising and promoting the deli pizza program to get customers to go to the back of the store where the deli is." **DB**

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Anticipating a Healthy Future



By
Jeffrey Spear
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Studio Spear
Jacksonville, FL

We are living in an age where information about the foods we eat and ways to maintain healthy diets is readily available — especially with so many food-oriented broadcasts, cookbooks, magazines, websites and blogs. What's surprising is that, at the deli counter, information that would help shoppers make informed, nutritional and healthful food choices is in short supply.

When we look at deli offerings, there are plenty of fried, salty, fatty, mayonnaise-laden and cholesterol-rich options. And while some are labeled low-fat or low-salt, the truly health-sensitive options are hard to identify, or few in numbers.

The obvious questions are: Do the folks who work at the deli counter care about what their customers eat? Why is nutritional information clearly provided on packaging in the center of the store yet so well obscured at the deli counter? Are there more healthful food options that could be offered?

When it comes to service staff, they rarely have much to say other than "Hello," "Can I help you?" and "Thank you." Without culinary or nutritional education about the products they handle, to expect dialogue related to food integrity and healthful options would be foolish.

There is, however, clear evidence that shoppers want to know what is in the foods they eat. Although there is ready access to nutritional statements on shelf-stable products, only service staff has access in the deli. While many deli departments offer tastings prior to purchase — a very generous and hospitable gesture — there is no disclosure of ingredients or dietary impact.

Of course, many manufacturers disclose comprehensive information on branded websites and consumer-oriented brochures; and emerging technologies allow tech-savvy shoppers to use their smart phones in supermarkets. Sadly, this practice has not yet reached the deli counter. Additionally, and while branded literature may be available, deli departments are either reluctant, or do not have the ability, to display these materials.

The opportunity for deli operators to become more proactive about healthful foods is clear. The key is to eliminate the cheap and nasty brands that rely on too much salt, artificial ingredients, chemical additives, preservatives and questionable manufacturing practices.

According to Kurt Dammeier, owner and founder of Beecher's Handmade Cheese, "Mass produced foods give us short shrift on flavor. High quality and high integrity foods deliver more enjoyment per dollar."

When it comes to variety, the American Heart Association advises us to eat lots of fruits and vegetables, unrefined whole grains and fish at least twice a week. Recognizing that healthier diets avoid saturated fats, the preference for red meats and cheeses is slowly giving way to poultry, seafood and vegetarian options.

It is clear that deli operators are responding by offering a wider variety of turkey and chicken products. That being said, variety in terms of seafood or vegetarian offerings rarely goes beyond a self-serve salad bar, olive bar and an assortment of mayonnaise-based salads.

According to David Sykas, director of commodity sales for Trident Seafood, "There are increasing numbers of deli operators who offer fully cooked, grab and go salmon as a seafood option in lieu of chicken. In addition, smoked and sliced salmon (lox) is finding its way into freshly prepared deli sandwiches."

While many deli departments offer tastings prior to purchase — a very generous and hospitable gesture — there is no disclosure of ingredients or dietary impact.

For more adventurous shoppers, seafood, vegetarian or vegan terrines would make a delicious departure from everyday deli options. According to Laurie Cummins, president of Alexian Pate, "Mainstream consumers do not yet know about these options. Availability tends to be

limited to specialty food stores that cater to their health conscious customers."

Without some degree of product education and/or advocacy, it will take time before they find their way into mainstream deli departments.

If you've attended the Natural Products Expo, you know there are lots of products that respond to the growing demand for more healthful food choices. Retailers such as Earth Fare, Whole Foods, Mollie Stone's and Native Sun have recognized this variety and offer plenty of diet sensitive options. As healthy food retailers, this is expected.

The opportunity for mainstream food retailers, and especially the deli department, is to become more proactive and follow the lead of the healthy food retailers. Stock your shelves and refrigerator case with high-integrity products that shun artificial ingredients and preservatives. Then, teach your staff about the merits of these brands. In addition, make nutritional information more visible — front and center would be nice — right alongside the big sale banners. Healthy foods for a healthy customer and a healthy bottom line.

It's not that choice and opportunity don't exist. Considering the popularity of freshly made sushi, and the speed in which it transformed from an exotic unknown to a supermarket staple, the notion of a more obvious and extensive selection of healthier foods in the deli department is not so hard to imagine.

DB

Blast From The Past

A Time-Honored Tradition



I

n 1994, Thomas Pugliese took a two-week vacation to Calabria, Italy and turned it into a two-year commitment at his family's cheese-making facility. It was there that Pugliese would learn the family tradition of mozzarella making from his grandparents at the family's farm, pictured at right. In 1996 Pugliese would return home to the United States and continue on with his cheese-making education at a farm in Pennsylvania, where he made goat cheeses.

A year later Antonio Mozzarella opened as a deli and catering facility in Springfield, NJ. The name was created in honor of Thomas Pugliese's mentor, Antonio. In 1999, a mere two years later, the deli expanded into a larger facility across the street, where Pugliese attracted the attention of local food retailers and the business evolved into Antonio Mozzarella Factory.

Eight years later the company would again outgrow itself and subsequently move to its current location in Newark, NJ. Today the state-of-the-art facility features almost 60,000 square feet and accommodates 12 shifts during its six days of operation every week.

Each day 150,000 pounds of raw milk are delivered for its many varieties of Fresh Mozzarella, Ricotta, Scamorza, Burrata, and butter.

With several awards from groups such as the World Championship Cheese Contest, Fancy Food Show and American Cheese Society Conference, Antonio Mozzarella Factory has indeed lived up to its heritage by following the same time-honored traditions as Pugliese's grandparents.

To that end the company makes a simple but profound promise to its customers: "Our Fresh Mozzarella contains no preservatives. Whether packed in water, saran wrapped or vacuum packed, Antonio mozzarella bursts with flavor and a taste that is truly the "Flower of the Milk."

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